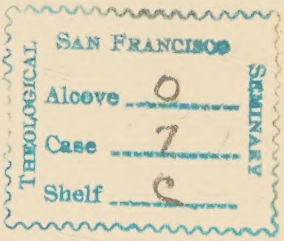
WAR BRIDES

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

BY

MARION CRAIG WENTWORTH

XY13
W48



The Santa Barbara Branch of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom has pleasure, through the courtesy of the author, in presenting to the Library

WAR BRIDES, *A Play*

By Marion Craig Wentworth, a powerful and moving expression of the new spirit in world relations. At its original production in New York, in 1915, the leading role was filled by Madame Nazimova.

Mrs. Charles S. Girvan
Chairman
Mission Canyon
Santa Barbara, California
U. S. A.

May 11, 1933

WAR BRIDES

Copyright, 1915, by
THE CENTURY CO.

Copyright, 1928, by
DRAMATISTS PLAY AGENCY, INC.

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

"War Brides" is fully protected in all countries by the Copyright Law. No performance, public reading, or radio broadcast may be given without permission of Dramatists Play Agency, Inc., 226 W. 47th St., New York City, N. Y.

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2026

https://archive.org/details/warbridesplayino0000mari

Marion Craig Wentworth

WAR BRIDES

A Play in One Act

BY

MARION CRAIG WENTWORTH

NEW YORK
DRAMATISTS PLAY AGENCY, INC.
1928

GRADUATE THEOLOGICAL UNION LIBRARY
San Francisco Theological Seminary Branch
2 Kensington Road, San Anselmo, CA 94960

PS
3545
E6778
W37
1928

This play was first produced
on January 25, 1915, at

B. F. KEITH'S PALACE THEATRE,
NEW YORK CITY

with the following cast:

Hedwig (Joan).....Mme. Nazimova
Amelia (Amy).....Mary Alden
Mother .....Gertrude Berkeley
Hoffman (Joseph Kerman)..Charles Bryant
Minna .....Edith Speare
Arno .....C. Brown
Hertz (Captain Bragg).....William Hasson
Peasants, Women and Soldiers.

Time—Present.

Place—A War-Ridden Country

TO

MY SON

BRANDON

IT MAY interest those who read "War Brides" for the first time, to know that the play was written in the early unbelievable days of the war, in September, 1914. It appeared in the February issue of the Century Magazine, 1915. This issue was on the newsstands January Twentieth. Madame Nazimova opened the play with a brilliant and stirring performance, at the Palace Theatre, New York City, a few days later, January Twenty-fifth to be exact. She played the vaudeville circuit from coast to coast and back again that year. So great was the demand to see the play that a second company was sent out, directed by Madame Nazimova and headed by Madame Gilda Varesi (the now famous author of "Enter Madame"). Madame Varesi played the three-a-day theatres, an almost superhuman task with the demand made upon her by the emotions of the heroine she was portraying—and covered the territory of the South and the smaller cities of the East where Madame Nazimova could not go.

The players who now may do the play will present it with a difference. They cannot know what we knew—those first days of utter bewilderment, when ideals crashed and the mind staggered before the catastrophe that descended upon us. Then, it will be remembered, "War Brides" was not merely a drama. It was a tremendous and vital experience, in which the feelings of author, actress and audience were fused into a single passionate revulsion against war and the disaster into which we, as a world, were irrevocably plunged and which was, with us, a biting acid horror, every hour and every moment of the day.

That time cannot come again. Nor can there be a similar presentation, with such fire and feeling on both sides of the footlights. But there will be something else perhaps. More beautiful because more detached. It will be given with a clearer understanding of the impersonal causes of war and without animosity toward any nation. It will be the voice of those who come after, concurring with us in our belief in the supreme value of life and life-giving, and its will to Peace. It will be simple Truth for Truth's sake, above the urge and setting of immediate and intolerable suffering. It will be less literal—and more a symbol. Which, in fact, it really is.

THE AUTHOR.

WAR BRIDES

The war brides were cheered with enthusiasm and the churches were crowded when the wedding parties spoke the ceremony in concert.—PRESS CLIPPING.

SCENE: *A room in a peasant's cottage in a war-ridden country. A large fireplace at the right. Near it a high-backed settle. On the left a heavy oak table and benches. Woven mats on the floor. A door at left leads into a bedroom. In the corner a cupboard. At the back a wide window with scarlet geraniums and an open door. A few fire-arms are stacked near the fireplace. There is an air of homely color and neatness about the room.*

Through the open door may be seen women stacking grain. Others go by carrying huge baskets of grapes or loads of wood, and gradually it penetrates the mind that all these workers are women, aristocrats and peasants side by side. Now and then a bugle blows or a drum beats in the distance. A squad of soldiers marches quickly by. There is everywhere the tense atmosphere of unusual circumstance, the anxiety and excitement of war.

Amelia, a slight, flaxen-haired girl of nineteen, comes in. She brushes off the hay with which she is covered, and goes to packing a bag with a secret, but determined, air. The Mother passes the win-

dow and appears in the doorway. She is old and work-worn, but sturdy and stoical. Now she carries a heavy load of wood, and is weary. She casts a sharp eye at Amelia.

MOTHER:
What are you doing, girl? [*Amelia starts and puts the bag in the cupboard.*] Who's going away? They haven't sent for Arno?

AMELIA:
No.

MOTHER:
[*Sighs, and drops her load on the hearth.*] Is the hay all in?

AMELIA:
Yes. I put in the last load. All the big work on our place is done, and so—[*Looks at her mother and hesitates. Her mother begins to chop the wood into kindling.*] I'll do that, Mother.

MOTHER:
Let be, girl. It keeps me from worrying. Get a bite to eat. What were you doing with that bag? Who were you packing it for?

AMELIA:
[*With downcast eyes.*]
Myself.

MOTHER:
[*Anxious.*]
What for?

AMELIA:
Sit down, Mother, and be still while I tell you—
[*Pushes her mother into a chair.*]

MOTHER:
[*Starts.*]
Is there any news? Quick! Tell me!

AMELIA:
Not since yesterday. Only they say Franz is at the front. We don't know where Emil and Otto are, and there's been a battle; but—

MOTHER:
[*Murmurs, with closed eyes.*]
My boys! my boys!

AMELIA:
Don't, Mother! They may come back.
[*A cheer is heard.*]

MOTHER:
[*Starting.*]
What's that?

AMELIA:
[*Running to the door and looking out.*]
They are cheering the war brides, that's all.

MOTHER:
Aye. There's been another wedding ceremony.

AMELIA:
Yes.

MOTHER:
How many war brides to-day?

AMELIA:
Ten, they said.

MOTHER:
[*Nodding.*]
Aye, that is good. Has anyone asked you, Amelia? [*Amelia looks embarrassed.*] Some one should ask you. You are a good-looking girl.

AMELIA:
[*In a low voice.*]
Hans Hoffman asked me last night.

MOTHER:
The young and handsome lieutenant? You are lucky. You said yes?

AMELIA:
[*Shakes her head.*]
No.

MOTHER:
Ah, well.

AMELIA:
I hardly know him. I've only spoken to him once. O Mother—that isn't what I want to do.

MOTHER:
What did you tell him?

AMELIA:
[*Timidly.*]
That I was going away to join the Red Cross.

MOTHER:
Amelia!

Amelia:
He didn't believe me. He kissed me—and I ran away.

Mother:
The Red Cross!

Amelia:
[*Eagerly.*]
Yes; that is what I was going to tell you just now. That is why I was packing the bag. [*Gets it.*] I—I want to go. I want to go to-night. I can't stand this waiting.

Mother:
You leave me, too?

Amelia:
I want to go to the front with Franz and Otto and Emil, to nurse them, to take care of them if they are wounded—and all the others. Let me, Mother! I, too, must do something for my country. The grapes are plucked and the hay is stacked. Hedwig is gathering the wheat. You can spare me. I have been dreaming of it night and day.

Mother:
[*Setting her lips decisively.*]
No, Amelia!

Amelia:
O Mother, why?

Mother:
You must help me with Hedwig. I can't manage her alone.

AMELIA:
Hedwig!

MOTHER:
She is strange; she broods. Hadn't you noticed?

AMELIA:
Why, yes; but I thought she was worrying about Franz. She adores him, and any day she may hear that he is killed. It's the waiting that's so awful.

MOTHER:
But it's more than the waiting with Hedwig. Aye, you will help Franz more by staying home to take care of his wife, Amelia, especially now.

AMELIA:
[*Puzzled.*]
Now?

MOTHER:
[*Goes to her work-basket.*]
Hedwig has told you nothing?

AMELIA:
No.

MOTHER:
Ah, she is a strange girl! She asked me to keep it a secret,—I don't know why,—but now I think you should know. See!
[*Very proudly she holds up the tiny baby garments she is knitting.*]

AMELIA:
[*Pleased and astonished.*]
So Franz and Hedwig—

Mother:

[*Nods.*]

For their child. In six months now. My first grandchild, Amelia. Franz's boy, perhaps. I shall hear a little one's voice in this house again.

Amelia:

[*Uncertainly, as she looks at the little things.*]

Still—I want to go.

Mother:

[*Firmly.*]

We must take care of Hedwig, Amelia. She is to be a mother. That is our first duty. It is our only hope of an heir if you won't marry soon—and if—if the boys don't come back.

Amelia:

Arno is left.

Mother:

Ah, but they'll be calling him next. It is his birthday to-day, too, poor lad. He's on the jump to be off. I see him gone, too. God knows I may never see one of them again. I sit here in the long evenings and think how death may take my boys,—even this minute they may be breathing their last,—and then I knit this baby sock and think of the precious little life that's coming. It's my one comfort, Amelia. Nothing must happen now.

Amelia:

[*With a touch of impatience.*]

What's the matter with Hedwig?

MOTHER:

I don't know what it is. She acts as if she didn't want to bring her child into the world. She talks wild. I tell you I must have that child, Amelia! I cannot live else. Hedwig frightens me. The other night I found her sitting on the edge of her bed staring,—when she should have been asleep,—as if she saw visions, and whispering, "I will send a message to the emperor." What message? I had to shake her out of it. She refuses to make a thing for her baby. Says, "Wait till I see what they do to Franz." It's unnatural.

AMELIA:

I can't understand her. I never could. I always thought it was because she was a factory-town girl.

MOTHER:

If anything should happen to Franz in the state she's in now, Hedwig might go out of her mind entirely. So you had best stay by, Amelia. We must keep a close eye on her.

[*There is a knock at the door.*]

Who's that?

AMELIA:

[*Looks out of the windows, and then whispers.*]

It's Hans Hoffman.

[*The knock is repeated.*]

MOTHER:

Open, girl! Don't stand there!

[*Enter Hoffman, gay, familiar, inclined to*

stoutness, but good-looking. Accustomed to having the women bow down to him.]

HOFFMAN:
[*To Amelia.*]
Ah, ha! You gave me the slip yesterday!

AMELIA:
My mother.

HOFFMAN:
[*Nodding.*]
Good day, Mother.
[*She curtsies.*]
[*Coming closer to Amelia.*]
Where did you run to? Here she as good as promised me she would wed me to-day, Mother, and then—

AMELIA:
Oh, no!

HOFFMAN:
Yes, you did. You let me kiss you.

AMELIA:
[*Taken aback.*]
Oh, sir!

HOFFMAN:
And when I got to the church square to-day, no bride for Hans Hoffman. Well, I must say, they had the laugh on me; for I had told them I had found the girl for me—the prettiest bride of the lot. But to-morrow—

AMELIA:
I can't.

HOFFMAN:

[*Taking hold of her.*]

Oh, yes, you can. I won't bother you long. I'm off to the front any day now. Come, promise me! What do you say, Mother?

MOTHER:

[*Slowly.*]

I should like to see her wed.

HOFFMAN:

There!

AMELIA:

[*Shrinking from both him and the idea.*]

But I don't know you well enough yet.

HOFFMAN:

Well, look me over. Don't you think I am good enough for her, Mother? Besides, we can't stop to think of such things now, Amelia. It is war-time. This is an emergency measure. And, then, I'm a soldier—like to die for my country. That ought to count for something—a good deal, I should say—if you love your country, and you do, don't you, Amelia?

AMELIA:

Oh, yes!

HOFFMAN:

Well, then, we can get married and get acquainted afterward.

AMELIA:

[*Faintly.*]

I wanted to be a nurse.

Hoffman:
Nonsense! Pretty girls like you should marry. The priests and the generals have commanded it. It's for the fatherland. Ought she not to wed me, Mother?

Mother:
[*Nodding impersonally.*]
Aye, it is for the fatherland they ask it.

Hoffman:
Of course. It is your patriotic duty, Amelia. You're funny. All the young women are tickled at the chance. But you are the one I have picked out, and I am going to have you. Now, there's a good girl—promise!

[*A hubbub of voices and a cheer are heard outside. Enter Minna, flushed, pretty, light headed.*]

Amelia:
Minna!

Minna:
[*Holding out her hand.*]
Amelia, see! My wedding-ring!

Amelia:
Iron!

Minna:
[*Triumphantly.*]
Yes; a war bride!

Amelia:
You?

MINNA:
That's what I am.
[*Whirling gaily about.*]

HOFFMAN:
[*Shaking her hand.*]
Good for you! Congratulations!

MINNA:
Didn't you hear them cheer? That was for me!

HOFFMAN:
There's patriotism for you, Amelia!

AMELIA:
When were you married, Minna?

MINNA:
Just now. There were ten of us. We all answered in chorus. It was fun—just like a theater. Then the priest made a speech, and the burgomaster and the captain. The people cheered, and then our husbands had to go to drill for an hour. Oh, I never was so thrilled! It was grand! They told us we were the true patriots.

HOFFMAN:
Hurrah! And so you are.

MINNA:
Our names will go down in history, honored by a whole people, they said.

[*They are all carried away by Minna's enthusiasm; even Amelia responds.*]

AMELIA:
But whom did you marry, Minna?

MINNA:
Heinrich Berg.

AMELIA:
[*Dubious.*]
That loafer!

MINNA:
He's all right. He's a soldier now. Why, he may be a hero, fighting for the fatherland; and that makes a lot of difference, Amelia.

HOFFMAN:
What did I tell you?

MINNA:
I probably wouldn't have picked him out in peace-times, but it is different now. He only asked me last night. Of course he may get killed. They said we'd have a widow's pension fund,—us and our children,—forever and ever, if the boys didn't come back. So, you see, I won't be out anything. Anyway, it's for the country. We'll be famous, as war brides. Even the name sounds glorious, doesn't it? War bride! Isn't that fine?

HOFFMAN:
Here's a little lady who will hear herself called that to-morrow. [*Takes Amelia's hand.*]

MINNA:
[*Clapping her hands.*]
Amelia a war bride, too! Good!

HOFFMAN:
You'll be proud to hear her called that, won't you, Mother? Give us your blessing.

MINNA:
I'd rather be a wife or a widow any day than be an old maid; and to be a war bride—oh!
[*Amelia is blushing and tremulous.*]

MOTHER:
[*With a far-away look.*]
It is for the fatherland, Amelia. Aye, aye, the masters have said so. It is the will and judgment of those higher than us. They are wise. Our country will need children. Aye. Say yes, my daughter. You will not say no when your country bids you! It is your emperor, your country, who asks, more than Hans Hoffman.

AMELIA:
[*Impressed, questions herself to see if her patriotism is strong enough to stand the test, while Hoffman, charmed by Amelia's gentleness, is moved by more personal feeling.*]

HOFFMAN:
[*Kissing Amelia on both cheeks.*]
There, it's all settled. [A faint cheer is heard *without.*] To-morrow they will cheer you like that; and when I go, I shall have a bride to wave me good-by instead of—
[*Enter Hedwig.*
She stands in the doorway, looking out on the distant crowds. She is tall, well built, and carries herself proudly. Strong, intel-

ligent features, but pale. Her eyes are large with anxiety. She has soft, wavy black hair. An inward flame seems to be consuming her.

The sounds continue in the distance, cheering, disputing mingled with far bugle-calls and marching feet.]

HEDWIG:

[*Contemptuously.*]

Ha!

[*The sound startles the others. They turn.*]

ALL:

Hedwig!

HEDWIG:

[*Still in the doorway, looking out.*]

War brides!

MINNA:

[*Pertly.*]

You're a war bride yourself, Hedwig.

HEDWIG:

[*Turns quickly, locates Minna, almost springs at her.*]

Don't you dare to call me a war bride! My ring is gold. See. [*Seizes Minna's hand, and then throws it from her.*] Not iron, like yours.

MINNA:

[*Boldy taunting.*]

They even call you the first war bride.

HEDWIG:

[*Furious, towering over her, her hand on her shoulder.*]

Say why, why?

MINNA:

[*Weakening.*]

Because you were the first one to be married when the war broke out.

HEDWIG:

[*Both hands on her shoulders.*]

Because the Government commanded? Because they bribed me with a promise of a widow's pension? Tell the truth.

MINNA:

[*Faintly.*]

No. Let me go.

HEDWIG:

So! And how long had Franz and I been engaged? Now say.

MINNA:

[*Beginning to be frightened.*]

Two years.

HEDWIG:

[*Flinging her off.*]

Of course. Everybody knows it. Every village this side the river knew we were to be married this summer. We've dreamed and worked for nothing else all these months. It had nothing to do with the war—our love,

our marriage. So, you see, I am no war bride. [*Walks scornfully away.*] Not like you, anyway.

[*They all stare at her.*]

HOFFMAN:

[*Stepping forward indignantly.*]

I don't know why you should have this contempt for our war brides, and speak like that.

HEDWIG:

[*Sits down, half turned away. She shrugs her shoulders, and her lips curl in a little smile.*]

HOFFMAN:

They are coming to the rescue of their country. Saving it; else it will perish.

HEDWIG:

[*Bitterly.*]

Ha!

HOFFMAN:

[*Waxing warmer.*]

They are the saviors of the future.

HEDWIG:

[*Sadly.*]

The future!

MOTHER:

[*Softly, laying her hand on Hedwig's shoulder.*]

Hedwig, be more respectful. Herr Hoffman is a lieutenant.

HOFFMAN:
When we are gone,—the best of us,—what will the country do if it has no children?

HEDWIG:
Why didn't you think of that before—before you started this wicked war?

HOFFMAN:
I tell you it is a glory to be a war bride. There!

HEDWIG:
[*With a shrug.*]
A breeding-machine! [*They all draw back.*] Why not call it what it is? Speak the naked truth for once.

HOFFMAN:
You'll take that back to-morrow, when your sister stands up in the church with me.

HEDWIG:
[*Starting up.*]
Amelia? Marry you? No! Amelia, is this true?

AMELIA:
[*Hesitating, troubled, and uncertain.*]
They tell me I must—for the fatherland.

HEDWIG:
Marry this man, whom you scarcely know, whom surely you cannot love! Why, you make a mock of marriage! It isn't that they have tempted you with the widow's pension? It is so tiny; it's next to nothing. Surely you wouldn't yield to that?

Amelia:

[*Frightened.*]

I did want to go as a nurse, but the priests and the generals—they say we must marry—to—for the fatherland, Hedwig.

Hoffman:

[*To Hedwig.*]

I command you to be silent!

Hedwig:

Not when my sister's happiness is at stake. If you come back, she will have to live with you the rest of her life.

Hoffman:

That isn't the question now. We are going away—the best of us—to be shot, most likely. Don't you suppose we want to send some part of ourselves into the future, since we can't live ourselves? There, that's straight; and right, too.

Hedwig:

[*Nodding slowly.*]

What I said—to breed a soldier for the empire; to restock the land. [*Fiercely.*] And for what? For food for the next generation's cannon. Oh, it is an insult to our womanhood! You violate all that makes marriage sacred! [*Agitated, she walks about the room.*] Are we women never to get up out of the dust? You never asked us if we wanted this war, yet you ask us to gather in the crops, cut the wood, keep the world going, drudge and slave, and wait, and agonize, lose our all, and go on bearing

more men—and more—to be shot down! If we breed the men for you, why don't you let us say what is to become of them? Do we want them shot—the very breath of our life?

HOFFMAN:

It is for the fatherland.

HEDWIG:

You use us, and use us—dolls, beasts of burden, and you expect us to bear it forever dumbly; but I won't! I shall cry out till I die. And now you say it almost out loud, "Go and breed for the empire." War Brides! Pah!

[*Minna gasps, beginning to be terrified. Hoffman rages. Mother gazes with anxious concern. Amelia turns pale.*]

HOFFMAN:

I never would dream of speaking of Amelia like that. She is the sweetest girl I have seen for many a day.

HEDWIG:

What will happen to Amelia? Have you thought of that? No; I warrant you haven't. Well, look. A few kisses and sweet words, the excitement of the ceremony, the cheers of the crowd, some days of living together,—I won't call it marriage, for Franz and I are the ones who know what real marriage is, and how sacred is it,—then what? Before you know it, an order to march. Amelia left to wait for her child. No husband to wait with her, to watch over her. Think of her anxiety, if she learns to love you! What kind of a child will it be?

Look at me. What kind of a child would *I* have, do you think? I can hardly breathe for thinking of my Franz, waiting, never knowing from minute to minute. From the way I feel, I should think my child would be born mad, I'm that wild with worrying. And then for Amelia to go through the agony alone! No husband to help her through the terrible hour. What solace can the state give then? And after that, if you don't come back, who is going to earn the bread for her child? Struggle and struggle to feed herself and her child; and the fine-sounding name you trick us with—war bride! Humph! that will all be forgotten then. Only one thing can make it worth while, and do you know what that is? Love. We'll struggle through fire and water for that; but without it—[*Gesture.*]

HOFFMAN:

[*Drawing Amelia to him.*]

Don't listen to her, Amelia.

AMELIA:

[*Pushing Hoffman violently from her, runs from the room.*]

No, no, I can't marry you! I won't! I won't! [*She shuts the door in his face.*]

HEDWIG:

[*Triumphantly.*]

She will never be your war bride, Hans Hoffman!

HOFFMAN:

[*Suddenly, angrily.*]

By thunder! I've made a discovery. You're the woman! You're the woman!

HEDWIG:

What woman?

HOFFMAN:

Yesterday there were twenty war brides. The day before there were nearly thirty. To-day there were only ten. There are rumors—[*Excitedly.*] I'll report you. They'll find you guilty. I myself can prove it.

HEDWIG:

Well?

HOFFMAN:

I heard them say at the barracks that some one was talking the women out of marrying. They didn't know who; but they said if they caught her—caught any one talking as you have just now, daring to question the wisdom of the emperor and his generals, the church, too—she'd be guilty of treason. You are working against the emperor, against the fatherland. Here you have done it before my very eyes; you have taken Amelia right out of my arms. You're the woman who's been upsetting the others, and don't you deny it.

HEDWIG:

Deny it? I am proud of it.

HOFFMAN:
Then the place for you is in jail. Do you know what will be the end of you?

HEDWIG:
[*Suddenly far away.*]
Yes, I know, if Franz does not come back. I know; but first [*Clenching her hands*] I must get my message to the emperor.

HOFFMAN:
[*Very angry.*]
You will be shot for treason.

HEDWIG:
[*Coming back, laughing slightly.*]
Shot? Oh, no, Herr Hans, you'd never shoot me!

HOFFMAN:
Why not?

HEDWIG:
Do I have to tell you, stupid? I am a woman: I can get in the crops; I can keep the country going while you are away fighting, and, most important, I might give you a soldier for your next army—for the kingdom. Don't you see my value? [*Laughs strangely.*] Oh, no, you'd never shoot me!

MOTHER:
There, there, don't excite her, sir.

HEDWIG:
[*Her head in her hands, on the table.*]
God! I wish you would shoot me! If you

don't give me back my Franz! I've no mind to bring a son into the world for this bloody thing you call war.

HOFFMAN:
I am going straight to headquarters to report you.
[*Starts to go.*
Enter Arno excitedly. He is boyish and fair, in his early twenties, and looks even younger than he really is.]

ARNO:
[*To Hoffman.*]
There's an order to march at once—your regiment.

HOFFMAN:
Now?

ARNO:
At once. You are wanted. They told me to tell you.
[*Hoffman moves with military precision to the door; then turns to Hedwig.*]

HOFFMAN:
I shall take the time to report you.
[*Goes.*]

MINNA:
[*To Arno.*]
Does Heinrich's regiment go, too?

ARNO:
Heinrich who?

MINNA:
Heinrich Berg.

ARNO:
No. To-morrow.
[*Minna, now thoroughly scared, is slinking to the door when Hedwig stops her.*]

HEDWIG:
Ha! little Minna, why do you run so fast? Heinrich does not go until to-morrow. [*Looks at her thoughtfully.*] Are you going to be able to fight it through, little Minna, when the hard days come? If you do give the empire a soldier, will it be any comfort to know you are helping the falling birth-rate?

MINNA:
[*Shivering.*]
Oh, I am afraid of you!

HEDWIG:
Afraid of the truth, you mean. You see it at last in all its brutal bareness. Poor little Minna! [*She puts her arm around Minna with sudden tenderness.*] But you need not be afraid of me, little Minna. Oh, no. The trouble with me is I want no more war. Franz is at the war. I'm half mad with dreaming they have killed him. Any moment I may hear. If you loved your man as I do mine, little Minna, you'd understand. Well, go now, and to-morrow say good-by to your husband—of a day.
[*Minna, with a frightened backward glance, runs out the door.*

Arno, who has been talking in low tones to his mother, now rises.]

ARNO:
Well, Mother, I haven't much time.
[*She clings to his hand.*]

HEDWIG:
[*Starting.*]
Arno!

ARNO:
I am going, too. Get those little things for me, Mother, will you?

MOTHER:
[*Goes to door and calls.*]
Amelia! Come. Arno has been called.
[*Amelia comes in. Each in turn embraces him, sadly, but bravely. Then the mother and sister gather together handkerchiefs, linen, writing-pad and pencil, and small necessaries.*]

ARNO:
I have only a few minutes.

HEDWIG:
[*Tenderly.*]
Arno, my little brother, oh, why—why must you go? You seem so young.

ARNO:
I'm a man, like the others; don't forget that, Hedwig. Be brave—to help me to be brave.
[*They sit on the settle.*]

HEDWIG:

[*Sighing.*]

Yes, it cannot be helped. Will you see my Franz, Arno? You look so like him to-day—the day I first saw him in the fields, the day of the factory picnic. It seems long ago. Tell him how happy he made me, and how I loved him. He didn't believe in this war—no more than I—yet he had to go. He dreaded lest he meet his friends on the other side. You remember those two young men from across the border? They worked all one winter side by side in the factory with Franz. They went home to join their regiments when the war was let loose on us. He never could stand it—Franz couldn't—if he were ordered to drive his bayonet into them. [*Gets up, full of emotion that is past expression.*] Oh, it is too monstrous! And for what—for what?

ARNO:

It is our duty. We belong to the fatherland. I would willingly give my life for my country.

HEDWIG:

I would willingly give mine for peace.

ARNO:

I must go. Good-by, Hedwig.

HEDWIG:

[*Controlling her emotion as she kisses him.*]

Good-by, my brave, splendid little brother.

AMELIA:

I may come to the front, too.

[*They embrace tenderly.*]

MOTHER:

[*Strong and quiet, unable to speak, holds his head against her breast for a moment.*]

Fight well, my son.

ARNO:

Yes, Mother.

[*He tears himself away. The silent suffering of the mother is pitiful. Her hands are crossed on her breast, her lips are seen to move in prayer. It is Hedwig who takes her in her arms and comforts her.*]

HEDWIG:

And this is war—to tear our hearts out like this! Make mother some coffee, Amelia, can't you?

[*Amelia prepares a cup of coffee for her mother.*]

MOTHER:

[*After a few moments composes herself.*]

There, I am right now. I must remember—and you must help me, my daughters—it is for the fatherland.

HEDWIG:

[*On her knees by the fire, shakes her head slowly.*]

I wonder, I wonder. O Mother, I'm not patient like you. I couldn't stand it. To have a darling little baby and see him grow into a

man, and then lose him like this! I'd rather never see the face of my child.

MOTHER:
We have them for a little while. I am thankful to God for what I have had.

HEDWIG:
Then I must be very wicked.

MOTHER:
Are you sleeping better now, child?

HEDWIG:
No; I am thinking of Franz. He may be lying there alone on the battle-field,—with none to help,—and I—here—longing to put my arms around him.

[*Buries her face on the mother's knees and sobs.*]

MOTHER:
Hush, Hedwig! Be brave! Take care of yourself! We must see that Franz's child is well born.

HEDWIG:
If Franz returns, yes; if not—I—

[*Gets up impulsively, as if to run out of the house.*]

AMELIA:
Don't you want your coffee, Hedwig?

[*Hedwig throws open the door, and suddenly confronts a man who apparently was about to enter the house. He is an official, the military head of the town, known as Captain Hertz. He is well along in years,*

rheumatic, but tremendously self-important.]

HERTZ:

[*Stopping Hedwig.*]

Wait one moment. You are the young woman I wish to see. You don't get away from me like that.

HEDWIG:

[*Drawing herself up, moves back a step or two.*]

What is it?

HERTZ:

[*Turning to the old mother.*]

Well, Maria, another son must go—Arno. You are an honored woman, a noble example to the state. [*Turns to Amelia.*] You have lost a very good husband, I understand. Well, you are a foolish girl. As for you [*Turning to Hedwig, and eyeing her critically and severely*], I hear pretty bad things. Yes, you have been talking to the women—telling them not to marry, not to multiply. In so doing you are working directly against the Government. It is the express request and command that our soldiers about to be called to the front and our young women should marry. You deliberately set yourself in opposition to that command. Are you aware that that is treason?

HEDWIG:

Why are they asking this, Herr Captain?

HERTZ:

Our statesmen are wise. They are thinking of

the future state. The nation is fast being depopulated. We must take precautionary measures. We must have men for the future. I warn you, that to do or say anything which subverts the plan of the empire for its own welfare, especially at a time when our national existence is in peril—well, it is treason. Were it not that you are the daughter-in-law of my old friend [*Indicating the Mother*], I should not take the trouble to warn you, but pack you off to jail at once. Not another word from you, you understand?

HEDWIG:

[*Calmly, even sweetly, but with fire in her eye.*]

If I say I will keep quiet, will you promise me something in return?

HERTZ:

What do you mean? Quiet? Of course you'll keep quiet. Quiet as a tombstone, if I have anything to say about it.

HEDWIG:

[*Calm and tense.*]

I mean what I say. Promise to see to it that if we bear you the men for your nation, there shall be no more war. See to it that they shall not go forth to murder and be murdered. That is fair. We will do our part,—we always have, —will you do yours? Promise.

HERTZ:

I—I—ridiculous! There will always be war.

HEDWIG:

Then one day we will stop giving you men. Look at mother. Four sons torn from her in one month, and none of you ever asked her if she wanted war. You keep us here helpless. We don't want dreadnoughts and armies and fighting, we women. You tear our husbands, our sons, from us,—you never ask us to help you find a better way,—and haven't we anything to say?

HERTZ:

No. War is man's business.

HEDWIG:

Who gives you the men? We women. We bear and rear and agonize. Well, if we are fit for that, we are fit to have a voice in the fate of the men we bear. If we can bring forth the men for the nation, we can sit with you in your councils and shape the destiny of the nation, and say whether it is to war or peace we give the sons we bear.

HERTZ:

[*Chuckling.*]

Sit in the councils? That would be a joke. I see. Mother, she's a little—[*touches his forehead suggestively.*] Sit in the councils with the men and shape the destiny of the nation! Ha! ha!

HEDWIG:

Laugh, Herr Captain, but the day will come; and then there will be no more war. No, you

shall not always keep us here, dumb, silent drudges. We will find a way.

HERTZ:

[*Turning to the mother.*]

That is what comes of letting Franz go to a factory town, Maria. That is where he met this girl. Factory towns breed these ideas. [*To Hedwig.*] Well, we'll have none of that here. [*Authoritatively.*] Another word of this kind of insurrection, another word to the women of your treason, and you will be locked up and take your just punishment. You remember I had to look out for you in the beginning when you talked against this war. You're a firebrand, and you know how we handle the like of you. [*Goes to door, turns to the mother.*] I am sorry you have to have this trouble, Maria, on top of everything else. You don't deserve it. [*To Hedwig.*] You have been warned. Look out for yourself.

[*Hedwig is rigid, with difficulty repressing the torrent of her feelings. Drums are heard coming nearer, and singing voices of men.*]

AMELIA:

[*At door.*]

They are passing this way.

HEDWIG:

Wave to Arno. Come, Mother. Ah, how quickly they go!

[*The official steps out of the door. There is quick rhythm of marching feet as the*

departing regiment passes not very far from the house.]

There he is! Wave, Mother. Good-by! good-by!

[*The women stand in the doorway, waving their sad farewells, smiling bravely. The sounds grow less and less, until there is the usual silence.*]

In another month, in another week, perhaps, all the men will be gone. We will be a village of women. Not a man left.

[*She leads the old mother into the house once more.*]

HERTZ:

[*In the door.*]

What did you say?

HEDWIG:

Not a man left, I said.

HERTZ:

You forget. *I* shall be here.

HEDWIG:

You are old. You don't count. They think you are only a woman, Herr Captain.

HERTZ:

[*Insulted.*]

You—you—

HEDWIG:

Oh, don't take it badly, sir. You are honored. Is the name of woman always to be despised? Look out in those fields. Who cleared them, and plucked the vineyards clean? You think

we are left at home because we are weak. Ah, no; we are strong. That is why. Strong to keep the world going, to keep sacred the greatest things in life—love and home and work. To remind men of—peace. [*With a quick change.*] If only you really were a woman, Herr Captain, that you might breed soldiers for the empire, your glory would be complete.

[*The old captain is about to make an angry reply when there is a commotion outside. The words "News from the front" are distinguished, growing more distinct. The captain rushes out. The women are paralyzed with apprehension for a moment.*]

MOTHER:

Amelia, go and see. Hedwig, come here.

[*Hedwig crouches on the floor close to the mother, her eyes wide with dread. In a few moments Amelia returns, dragging her feet, woe in her face, and unable to deal the blow which must fall on the two women, who stare at her with blanched faces.*]

AMELIA:

[*Falling at her mother's knee.*]

Mother!

MOTHER:

[*Scarcely breathing.*]

Which one?

AMELIA:

All of them.

MOTHER:

[*Dazed.*]

All? All my boys?

AMELIA:

Emil, Otto—be thankful Arno is left.

[*The Mother drops her head back against the chair and silently prays. Hedwig creeps nearer Amelia and holds her face between her hands, looking into her eyes.*]

HEDWIG:

[*Whispering.*]

Franz?

AMELIA:

Franz, too.

[*Hedwig lies prostrate on the floor. Their grief is very silent; terrible because it is so dumb and stoical. The Mother is the first to rouse herself. She bends over Hedwig.*]

MOTHER:

Hedwig. [*Hedwig sobs convulsively.*] Don't, child. Be careful for the little one's sake. [*Hedwig sits up.*] For your child be quiet, be brave.

HEDWIG:

I loved him so, Mother!

MOTHER:

Yes, he was my boy—my first-born.

HEDWIG:
Your first-born, and this is the end.
[*She rises up in unutterable wrath and despair.*]
O God!

MOTHER:
[*Anxious for her.*]
Promise me you will be careful, Hedwig. For the sake of your child, *your* first-born, that is to be—

HEDWIG:
My child? For this end? For the empire—the war that is to be? No!

MOTHER:
[*Half to herself.*]
He may look like Franz.
[*Hedwig quickly seizes the pistol from the mantel-shelf and moves to the bedroom door. Amelia watching her, sees her do it, cries out in alarm and rushes to take it from her.*]

AMELIA:
[*In horror.*]
Hedwig! What are you doing? Give it to me? No, you must not! You have too much to live for.

HEDWIG:
[*Dazed.*]
To live for? Me?

AMELIA:
Why, yes, you are going to be a mother.

HEDWIG:

A mother? Like her? [*Looks sadly at the bereaved old mother.*] Look at her! Poor Mother! And they never asked her if she wanted this thing to be! Oh, no! I shall never take it like that—never! But you are right, Amelia. I have something to do first. [*Lets Amelia put the pistol away in the cupboard.*] I must send a message to the emperor.

[*The others are more alarmed for her in this mood than in her grief.*]

You said you were going to the front to be a nurse, Amelia. Can you take this message for me? I might take it myself, perhaps.

AMELIA:

[*Hesitating, not knowing what to say or do.*] Let me give you some coffee, Hedwig.

[*Voices are heard outside, and the sounds of sorrow. Some one near the house is weeping. A wild look and a fierce resolve lights Hedwig's face.*]

HEDWIG:

[*Rushing from the house.*]

They have taken my Franz!

MOTHER:

Get her back! I feared it. Grief has made her mad.

[*Amelia runs out. A clamor of voices outside. Hedwig can be heard indistinctly speaking to the women. Finally her voice alone is heard, and in a moment she appears, backing into the doorway, still talking to the women.*]

HEDWIG:

[*A tragic light in her face, and hand uplifted.*]

I shall send a message to the emperor. If ten thousand women send one like it, there will be peace and no more war. Then they will hear our tears.

A VOICE:

What is the message? Tell us!

HEDWIG:

Soon you will know. [*Loudly.*] But I tell you now, *don't bear any more children* until they promise you there shall be no more war.

HERTZ:

[*Suddenly appearing. Amelia follows.*]

I heard you. I declare you under arrest. Come with me. You will be shot for treason.

MOTHER:

[*Fearfully, drawing him aside.*]

Don't say that, sir. Wait. Oh, no, you can't do that!

[*She gets out her work-basket, and shows him the baby things she has been knitting, and glances significantly at Hedwig. A horrid smile comes into the man's face. Hedwig, snatches the things and crushes them to her breast as if sacrilege had been committed.*]

HERTZ:

Is this true? You expect—

HEDWIG:

[*Proudly, scornfully.*]

You will not shoot me if I give you a soldier for your empire and your armies and your guns, will you, Herr Captain?

HERTZ:

Why—eh, no. Every child counts these times. But we will put you under lock and key. You are dangerous. I warned you. Come along.

HEDWIG:

You want my child, but still you will not promise me what I asked you. Well, we shall see.

HERTZ:

Come along.

HEDWIG:

Give me just a moment. I want to send a message to the emperor. Will you take it for me, Herr Captain?

MOTHER:

[*Signing.*]

Humor her.

HERTZ:

Well, well, hurry up!

[*Hedwig sits at table and writes a brief note.*]

[*Whispering.*]

She has lost Franz. She is crazed.

HEDWIG:

[*Rising.*]

There. See that it is placed in the hands of the emperor. [*Gives him the note.*] Good-by, Amelia! Never be a war bride, Amelia. [*Kisses her three times.*] Good-by, Mother. [*Embraces her tenderly.*] Thank you for these.

[*She gathers the baby things in her hands, crosses the room, pressing a little sock to her lips. As she passes the cupboard she deftly seizes the pistol, and moves into the bedroom. On the threshold she looks over her shoulder.*]

HEDWIG:

[*Firmly.*]

You may read the message out loud.

[*She disappears into the room, still pressing the little sock to her lips.*]

HERTZ:

[*Reading the note.*]

"A Message to the Emperor: I refuse to bear my child until you promise there shall be no more war."

[*A shot is fired in the bedroom. They rush into the room. The Mother stands trembling by the table.*]

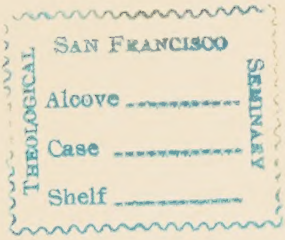
HERTZ:

[*Awed, coming out of the room with the baby things, which he places on the table.*]

Dead! Tcha! tcha! she was mad. I will hush it up, Maria.

[*He tears up Hedwigs's message to the emperor, and goes out of the house, shaking his head. Amelia is kneeling in the doorway of the bedroom, bending over something, and softly crying. The Mother slowly gathers up the pieces of Hedwig's message and the baby garments, now dashed with blood, and, sitting on the bench, holds them tight against her breast, staring straight in front of her, her lips moving inaudibly. She closes her eyes and rocks to and fro, still muttering and praying.*]

CURTAIN

DATE DUE

GTU Library
3 2400 00661 8569